

Good Shepherd Episcopal Church
Sunday Sermon, July 28, 2024
Fr. John Warfel

My older sister, Jeannie, used to hoard bottles of Coca-Cola
Back then, Coke only came in glass bottles
heavy, thick, green tinted returnable bottles
no cans, no liter-sized plastic containers
just six-packs of coke in stiff cardboard cartons-
complete with built-in handles

There was only one kind of Coca-Cola back then
no diet coke, or caffeine free coke or heaven forbid,
no vanilla coke
in my home growing up, a carton of coke was a rare treat

It wasn't that my parents were mean or cheap
They just considered some things to be frivolous,
especially if they were "non-nutritional"
So a rare carton of coke claimed a place of honor in our fridge

But soon, one by one, the 16 oz. bottles disappeared-
leaving the empty carton, sad and lonely all by itself.
I'm not saying that Jeannie had taken all six,
but invariably she stowed away one or two bottles-
on the top shelf of her clothes closet,
well beyond my six-year-old reach.

Days after the empty carton was finally removed from the fridge
and we all had forgotten about the coke,
some of Jeannie's friends would drop by
and suddenly, a bottle of coke would magically appear

Some say that feeding of the 5000 happened the same way,
that the real miracle was the collective shift from hoarding to sharing
This is one way to interpret the miraculous feeding of the 5000

Because let's face it, we all fear scarcity
We're afraid of running out and so we hoard.
The willingness to share is hard enough in times of abundance
But in times of scarcity, we think of ourselves first.

Others believe that the feeding of the 5000 was truly a miracle,
that Jesus changed 5 loaves and two fish into enough food to feed 5000
He certainly could have.

Is this yet another example of God piercing through our own reality?
I believe that the miracle of the loaves and fishes is just that, a miracle

Christ takes, blesses, breaks and gives;
through this action something expands

something becomes something different,
something more than it was before
something much more than just itself

Ah, that's a lot like something else we hold dear, isn't it?
Yes, that's a lot like the Eucharist

The parallel between the loaves and fishes and the Eucharist is obvious,
Obvious and intentional,
What happened at the feeding of the 5000-
happens again at the Last Supper
Jesus takes, blesses, breaks and gives
These are also the four actions of the Eucharist

First, the Deacon **takes** the bread and wine from the People
Then the Priest **blesses** both in the Eucharistic Prayer-
and the People assent to the prayer with the great amen
next the Priest **breaks** the bread in the fraction.
Finally Deacon, Priest and Lay Eucharistic Ministers-
give the bread and wine back to the People
A Eucharist is not valid unless all four functions are performed.

When I meet with children before their First Communion-
I tell them two things:
First I say, *You may feel something special when you receive communion
but then again you may not,
and if you don't that's OK*

Then I say, *receiving communion may not make a lot of sense to you now,
but that's OK too.
The thing to remember is that you belong, you're part of the family
And when we take, bless, break and give, Jesus is right here among us.*

God wants us trust Godself,
to trust God to lead us on a journey that will last our whole life-time-
and beyond.

Taking Communion is a rest stop along the journey
It's a safe place to stop and rest and eat,
not your normal food, but spiritual food.

Then I say to the kids:
*It makes me happy that you want to come to the communion rail
you are very welcome there
you will always be welcome there.*

And to all the grown-ups I say:
*Whether we've been coming to Communion for a year or for eighty years,
we may or may not feel something special-
when we receive the wafer and wine
Fortunately, the miracle of Christ's Body and Blood doesn't depend on feelings*

Each time we share in the Body of Christ we become the Body of Christ
Each time we celebrate the Eucharist, God takes, blesses, breaks and gives

God takes us, as we are, needy, selfish, fearing scarcity
God blesses us with God's Presence and unconditional love
God breaks us of old ways, old fears, even the impulse to hoard
and God gives us the challenge and the grace to reflect God's love in the world

There is enough of God to go around
Enough grace, love and intimacy for all of us
We never need to compete for God's attention
We don't have to hoard God, to stow God in some secret place-
so that we won't run out of God.
God is inexhaustible.

The Eucharist is inexhaustible too.
The four-part action of taking, blessing, breaking and giving-
continues uninterrupted for over 2000 years now
a bottomless chalice,
manna from heaven, given to us anew each day; **it's the *real thing***

Those times in my life when I've missed church because I was out of town,
(or I just didn't feel like going)
those Sundays when I hadn't received Holy Communion,
I've experienced a kind of withdrawal,
a tangible absence of something nurturing and life-giving.

And those times in my life when I've had the luxury of daily Communion,
in seminary or on an extended retreat,
I've experienced undeniable strength and endurance
I've experienced the transcendent God
a connection to all that ever was and all that will ever be
The more we share in Eucharist
The more there is of **God within us** to discover.

I can't explain it; I won't even try
But one thing I can say with certainty.
God invites all of us to take our place at the Table.
There's always more than enough to go around.
At God's table, we'll never find an empty carton of anything.